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# ENG 3504-001: Film and Literature: Back to High School

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## Film and Literature: Back to High School

### English 3504–Fall, 2002

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#### Required texts:

*The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, by Thomas Hine (1999)  
*The Catcher in the Rye*, J. D. Salinger (1951)  
*Cherry: A Memoir*, Mary Karr (2000)  
*Push*, Sapphire (1996)  
*Cruddy*, Lynda Barry (1999)  
*Stuck Rubber Baby*, Howard Cruse (1995)  
 Plus: a course packet (available at Copy Express in the student union)

#### Cinematic texts:

*Blackboard Jungle* (directed by Richard Brooks, 1955)  
*Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955)  
*Rushmore* (Wes Anderson, 1998)  
*Whatever* (Susan Skoog, 1998)  
*Dangerous Minds* (John N. Smith, 1995)  
*Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001) or *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986)  
*The Merchants of Cool* (2001)  
*Election* (Alexander Payne, 1999)  
*Ghost World* (Terry Zwigoff, 2001)

### COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

(read the following carefully; these words constitute our contract,  
 and I will request your written agreement to them)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** We will examine artistic impressions of high school experience as projected through the lenses of film and literature. We'll also work to "read" film as closely as we've been trained to read literature, and we'll consider such questions as these: why are there so many movies, novels, and short stories about high school? Are they realistic? If not, what are they trying to tell us (or sell us)? Do literary and cinematic artists tend to highlight different features of high school life? Does either do it better? What has the word "teenager" come to mean, and how did this relatively recent concept arise, and why? The usual suspects will certainly enter the room: race, class, gender, and sexuality (note to the squeamish—beware).

Class participation is required in this discussion-based course, and films will need to be seen during screenings that will take place outside of regularly scheduled class time. Much of the material in this course will be difficult to grasp and to discuss, so you must be prepared for each class meeting by reading the material carefully beforehand in order to fully participate in our discussions.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

- To gain insight into both literary and cinematic techniques of creating meaning
- To understand the creation and rise of the “American teenager” as a social and cultural phenomenon, and to examine the influences that literature and film have had in the shaping of this phenomenon
- To encourage consideration of how cultural factors intersect with others, including race, class, gender, sexuality, and religious preference
- To practice articulating your well-considered responses to the issues raised by the course, both verbally and in writing

**GRADES:** Your final course grade will be determined in the following way:

Exam 1	15%
Final exam	25%
1 <sup>st</sup> Formal essay (4-5 pages)	15%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Formal essay (6-8 pages)	25%
10-minute presentation and handout	10%
Participation/quizzes/attendance	10%

**REGARDING WRITING:** When the formal essays are turned in, they **MUST** be accompanied in a folder by all notes and drafts written towards them, with the final copy of the essay on top of these materials. I will use these materials to gauge and offer comments on your writing process. I **WILL NOT GRADE** an essay that is not accompanied by material that clearly demonstrates several earlier stages leading up to the final draft, so be sure to save all such materials (if you do most or all of your writing on a computer, print out occasional drafts to include with your final copy). Essays unaccompanied by materials that clearly demonstrate several stages of development toward the final copy will receive an automatic ZERO.

All writing assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the day they are due. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late.

**REGARDING READING:** Since one skill you will be developing in this class is the art of textual analysis, you must give the readings more than a quick skimming over. Instead of wolfing them down right before class, set aside enough time to read carefully—take notes as you read, then decide for yourself, before coming to class, what each author is trying to describe and bring to light. Also, to ensure that your final grade reflects your reading effort, I will occasionally give “pop” quizzes at the beginning of class on required readings. These quizzes will be unannounced beforehand and they cannot be made up. I recognize that some students

must be absent at times; accordingly, when I compile your quiz grades at the end of the semester into an average score, I will drop the lowest one—if you miss a quiz, that will be your one dropped quiz. If you don't miss any quizzes, I will still drop your lowest score from your quiz average.

**PRESENTATIONS:** Early in the semester, I will assign particular days on our “Daily Schedule” to pairs of students. I will give each pair a published article or two that pertains to the day's reading or viewing assignment. Each pair's task will include (1) reading their article(s) carefully and preparing for the class a one-page handout that succinctly summarizes the main points of the outside reading, and (2) summarizing those main points for the class verbally, and then leading class discussion by asking prepared, relevant questions that prompt indepth discussion. The handout must include all relevant bibliographic information for the outside readings so that your classmates can find them.

**MISSED QUIZZES AND EXAMS, AND LATE PAPERS:** Because the answers to unannounced quizzes come up in class after they are taken, quizzes cannot be made up (even if you come to class late). These quizzes are one way to reward those who attend class regularly and on time. Regarding exams, there will be no make-up exams in this course. Students who miss either the midterm or final exam, for whatever reason, will be required to write a formal, six- to eight-page essay on a topic of the professor's choice. Again, papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late. You may turn in the two essays before their due dates if you know you must miss class that day.

**FILM-SCREENINGS:** In addition to required regular class meetings on Monday and Wednesday afternoons, attendance in this course is also mandatory for 6 film-screenings outside of our regularly scheduled class time. Any absence from these screenings will count as a regular absence from class (see “Attendance Policy” below regarding absence limitations). Our film-screenings will occur at 6 p.m. on 6 Mondays throughout the semester (9/9, 9/16, 9/30, 10/14, 10/21, and 11/4). If you are signed up for another class or activity that regularly conflicts with this screening time, you'll need to drop either this Film and Literature class or the other class or activity.

**E-MAIL ACTIVITY:** Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it frequently, preferably every day, for messages pertaining to this course. You already have a free EIU e-mail account, which I prefer that you use. You can use a commercial account for this course, but you MAY NOT use a free web-based account (such as Hotmail or Yahoo) because they often cause problems with listserv subscriptions. Our class discussions will carry over onto the e-mail listserv, and I will occasionally send messages to the entire class. E-mail is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. Getting an e-mail account AND CHECKING IT REGULARLY is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message at the above address by Friday, August 30 at 10:30 a.m. to confirm that you have established an account, I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In your message, describe yourself in whatever way you choose (including your major), and also write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with these course policies and procedures.

**CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT:** In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade). The best way to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say. I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other people have the same question.

**FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** If you have a disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, let me know; also, if you haven't contacted the Coordinator of Disability Services (581-6583), do so as soon as possible.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** I will take attendance, and I expect you to attend every scheduled class, on time, and prepared to discuss the material listed for that day on the "daily schedule." Again, film-screenings are also mandatory. More than four missed classes and/or film screenings will lower your final grade by one letter grade for each subsequent absence (i.e., if you miss five classes, you can't get an "A" in this course). Missing class frequently will also harm your grade on the reading quizzes. In addition, note that coming to class "prepared" means coming to class with that day's assigned reading—anyone who does not have the day's assigned reading with them will be considered absent. Regarding tardiness: this is a small class, so late arrivals are disruptive—if for some bizarre reason you wish to get on my bad side, you can easily do so by developing the habit of arriving late for class. If you will not be able to arrive for this course on time because of other commitments, you'll need to drop this course. Finally, you are responsible for all assignments, whether you attend class or not. Get the telephone number of one or two other students in class, or get a hold of me, so you can find out about missed assignments *before* you come to class.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the English Department's policy on plagiarism: "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office."

## ENGLISH 3504: DAILY SCHEDULE

**Note:** This schedule may change; any changes will be announced in advance. Reading and writing assignments are to be completed by the dates on which they appear on the syllabus. BE SURE to bring the appropriate book or books to class if a reading assignment is listed for that day; students who show up without a copy of the day's reading assignment will be marked absent.

M AUG 26 Introduction to the course

- In-class film-screening: clips from *Blackboard Jungle*

W AUG 28 Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, Chapter Twelve, "The Teen Age" (225-48)

M SEP 2 No Classes -- Labor Day

W SEP 4 Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, 1-88

M SEP 9 *Catcher in the Rye*, 88-134

- 6:00 Film-screening: *Rebel without a Cause*

W SEP 11 Discussion of *Rebel without a Cause*; In addition to seeing the film, read in our course packet: Patrick McCord, "Writing in Light: Critical Analysis of Movies" (2002)

M SEP 16 *Catcher in the Rye*, 135-end

- 6:00 Film-screening: *Rushmore*

W SEP 18 Discussion of *Rushmore*; In addition to seeing the film, read in our Course Packet: David Denby, "High School Confidential: Notes on Teen Movies" (1999)

M SEP 23 Hine, *The Rise and Fall*, Chapter Two, "Only a Phase?" (25-42)

W SEP 25 Karr, *Cherry: A Memoir*

M SEP 30 *Cherry*

- 6:00 film-screening: *Whatever*

W OCT 2 Discussion of *Whatever*

M OCT 7 *Cherry*

- Paper 1 due

W OCT 9 Course packet: Emily White, excerpt from *Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut* (2002)

M OCT 14 Exam 1

- 6:00 film-screening: *Election*

W OCT 16 Discussion of *Election*

F OCT 18 No Classes -- Fall Break

M OCT 21 Sapphire, *Push*

- 6:00 film-screening: *Dangerous Minds*

W OCT 23 Discussion of *Dangerous Minds*

M OCT 28 *Push*

W OCT 30 Barry, *Cruddy*

M NOV 4 *Cruddy*

- 6:00 film-screening: *Blue Velvet* or *Donnie Darko*

W NOV 6 Discussion of *Blue Velvet* or *Donnie Darko*

M NOV 11 *Cruddy*

W NOV 13 Howard Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby*

M NOV 18 *Stuck Rubber Baby*

- deadline for one-page proposal for final paper

W NOV 20 *Stuck Rubber Baby*

NOVEMBER 25-29 THANKSGIVING RECESS

M DEC 2 In-class film-screening: *The Merchants of Cool* (a sixty-minute film)

W DEC 4 Continue discussion of *The Merchants of Cool*, and discuss Course Packet reading for today: Ann Powers, "Introduction: New Day Rising" (from *Weird Like Us: My Bohemian America*, 2000)

- 6:00 film-screening: *Ghost World*

M DEC 9 Discussion of *Ghost World*

W DEC 11 Hine, *The Rise and Fall*, Chapter Fifteen, "Life After Teenagers" (298-304); discussion of *Ghost World* continued; Final paper due at the beginning of class; tearful, heartfelt farewells

Final Exam Time: TBA